

Deuteronomy Chapters 33 & 34 Torah Reading (Parahat Ve-Zot HaBerachah)  
English version to be sung to the Torah tropes by Len Fellman  
Latest version September 25, 2019

33:1 Now this [is the blessing] that was [bestowed by Moses], the man of God, on *B'nei Yisrael*, before his death.

2[And he said this]: YHWH—[from Sinai] He came. [He rose up] from Seir [upon them].

[He shone forth] from Mount Paran, approaching from Rivevot Kodesh.[At His right hand] were fire bolts\*[for them].

\*Robert Alter

3 Although He has affection\* for the peoples,[all His holy ones] [are in your hand].

\*Everett Fox

[They place themselves] at your feet, bearing your words.

4 “A Torah was prescribed to us by Moses; a heritage for the assembly of Jacob.”

5 He became in Jeshurun, a king,[when there gathered] the chiefs of the people all together: the tribes of Israel.

*Blessings of the tribes:*

6 May **Reuven** live,[and not die], although his menfolk[are few in number].

7 And this[is for **Judah**]: [Moses said], Harken, YHWH to the voice of Judah.

[To his people] [you shall bring him]. [Though his hands' strength] suffices him, [end aliyah] a help against his foes, you shall be.

8 To **Levi** he said, “Your *Thumim* and your *Urim* (oracular objects) are for your man who is faithful,

the one[whom you tested] at Massah,[and contended with] at the Waters of Dispute (Meribah).

9 [He it was who said] of his father and his mother, “[I have not] [seen them]”; his brothers[he did not] recognize, and his sons he did not know.

For they observed what You said,[and your covenant] they preserved.

10 [They shall] [teach Your laws] to Jacob, Your Torah to Israel.

[They shall put] incense in Your nostrils,[and whole offerings] on your altar.

11 O bless, YHWH, his efforts (*chayil*). On the work of his hands,[look with favor].

Smash[the loins of all those] [rising up against him]. [Let those who hate him] [rise no more].

12 To **Benjamin** he said, Beloved of YHWH: He rests securely,[beside Him].

God [oversees him] [all day long]. [end aliyah] Between God's shoulders he rests.

33:13 To **Joseph** he said, Blessed of YHWH is his land, [from the bounty] of heaven—[heaven's dew], and from the deep waters below;  
 14 [from the bounty] of the yield of the sun, [and from the bounty] brought forth by the moon.  
 15 [From the top] of the mountains so ancient; [from the bounty] of the hills everlasting.  
 16 [And from the bounty] of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of the Dweller in the bush.  
 [May they come] onto the head of Joseph, onto the crown (brow) of the elect of his brothers.  
 17 Like a firstling bull—such [is the splendor of him]. The horns [of a wild ox] [are his horns].  
 [With both of them] [he will smite peoples]—he will gore them altogether, [to the ends of the earth].  
 The horns are the myriads of Ephraim, [end aliyah] and they are the thousands of Manasseh.  
 18 To **Zebulun** he said, Rejoice, O Zebulun [when you go out], and **Issachar**, in your tents.  
 19 Peoples [to the hills they will call]: there [they will offer sacrifices] of triumph.  
 Indeed [from the riches] of the sea [they will draw], [and from hoards] that are hidden in the sand.  
 20 To **Gad** [he said this]: Blessed [is He who enlarges] Gad. [Like a lion] [he is poised] to tear off arm and scalp.  
 21 He saw [the best place] (*re'shit*) [as for himself], [for that was the place] where a share for a ruler was preserved\*.  
 He came with the heads of the people. The judgments of YHWH he carried out, [end aliyah] and his decisions for Israel.  
 22 To **Dan** [he said this]: Dan is the whelp of a lion, [springing forth] from the Bashan.  
 23 To **Naphtali** he said, Naphtali is sated with favor, being full of the blessings of YHWH. To the west and to the south, he will take possession.  
 24 To **Asher** he said, Blessed among the sons is Asher. [May he be favored] by his brothers, and dip into oil, his foot.  
 25 Iron and copper [are your gate bolts], and for as long as your days, [may be your strength].  
 26 There is none like the God (*El*) of Jeshurun.  
 He rides through the heavens to your rescue, [end aliyah] [and in His triumph] [through the skies].  
 27 A refuge is the God of old. Beneath are the arms everlasting. [He shall drive out] [from before you] the enemy, proclaiming, “Destroy!”  
 28 [Thus there will dwell] Israel securely: untroubled, the abode\* of Jacob, in a land of grain [and new wine].  
 [Even your heavens] [will drip with dew].

\*Everett Fox

\*Robert Alter and JPS

33:29 Ó Happy Israel! Who<sup>◌</sup> [is there like you]? [A people] delivered by YHWH, your shield of help and the sword of your triumph.  
[They will cower]—your enemies—[before you], [end aliyah] and you—on their backs you will tread.

34:1 Then went up Moses from the steppes of Moab to [Mount Nebo], [to the top] of the Pisgah—the cliff that faces Jericho,  
[where he was shown] [by YHWH] [all of the land] from the Gilead [as far as Dan],  
2 and [all of Naphtali], the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah [as far as] the western sea,  
3 [as well as] the Negev [and the flat plain] [that is the valley] [of Jericho], city of date palms, as far as Zoar.  
4 Then spoke YHWH [to him these words]: this is the land [about which] [I made a firm oath] to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, [in which I said],  
”[to your seed] [I will give it].” [I have let you see it] [with your own eyes], [but to that place] [you shall not cross].  
5 And so he died there—[Moses the servant] [of YHWH] in the land of Moab, by the word of YHWH.  
6 They buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor. [Not known] [by any man] is [his burial place], even to this day.  
7 [And Moses] [was age one hundred] [and twenty] years [when he died], when not dimmed were his eyes, and not gone was his vigor.  
8 [And they wept]—the children of Israel [were grieving for Moses] in the plains of Moab for thirty days,  
[when there ended] the days of weeping—the mourning for Moses.  
9 [And Joshua] [son of Nun] was filled with a spirit of wisdom, [due to the fact] [that Moses had laid] his hands upon him,  
[so there hearkened] [to him] [B'nei Yisrael], [and they did] [just as it was] commanded by YHWH to Moses.  
10 [There did not arise] a prophet [ever again] in Israel like Moses, who [was known] by YHWH face to face,  
11 for the various signs [and miracles] for which he was sent by YHWH to perform in the land of Egypt,  
to Pharaoh and to all his servants, [and to all his land],  
12 and in all the power—the mighty hand, and in all the awesome great acts that were done by Moses [end aliyah] in the eyes [of all Israel].

## Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some “poetic licence”, and some willingness on the part of the listener to be “carried” by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these “transtropilations” are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a “window” into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. “cut a covenant”) to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 “beam above the door” rather than “lintel”) to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between “literalness” and “listenable-ness”. A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh *or* yetiv kadma *or* pashta geresh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, geresh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts]

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi'i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the “grey bracket” device, I indicate the following pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which will have the combined melody:

mercha/tipcha	kadma/geresh ( <i>or</i> : azla, etc.)	mercha siluk
(Renew our days)	(She weeps bitterly).	(a fire-offering to God)

Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don’t strictly match the Hebrew. I also “pad” some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the *leyner*’s cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g’dola* (ר), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the musical phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalsholet*.)

“*Metigah-zakef*” is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a kadma and a zakef katon appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

[Take heed—take care for yourself]

In some trope systems (notably cantor Moshe Haschel in “Navigating the Bible II”) this is given a very distinctive melody—for which purpose extra syllables fill out the musical phrase (as in “take care” in this example). Haschel’s system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don’t write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name יהוה as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the *leyner* can choose to pronounce it as “God” or “Adonai”.

*The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:*

Aryeh Kaplan, ‘The Living Torah’ (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)  
 Richard Elliott Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’ (2003)  
 Everett Fox, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (1997)  
 The Stone Edition ‘Tanach’ (1996)  
 JPS ‘Hebrew-English Tanach’, (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2000), *along with* Orlinsky, ‘Notes on the New Translation of the Torah’ (1969)  
 Robert Alter, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (2004)  
 Commentaries in the ‘Anchor Bible’ series  
 Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)  
 The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)  
 The New King James Bible (1982)